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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 10 TEL AVIV 001593

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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOXO
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast
12. Iran: Nuclear Program

Key stories in the media:

On Sunday, Yediot reported that on May 21, Ehud Olmert will pay his first visit to the United States as prime minister and will meet with President Bush. The newspaper said that Olmert's advisers, Prime Ministers Bureau director-designate Yoram Turbovitz and Dov Weisglass, are already working with Bush's advisers to prepare for the visit, together with the Israeli Ambassador in Washington, Danny Ayalon. Yediot wrote that US administration leaders have suggested that Olmert appear before both houses of Congress as a special gesture of the friendship between the two countries. (Only Rabin and Netanyahu were accorded similar honors.) The newspaper reported that Olmert is leaning toward accepting the suggestion. Yediot reported that Olmert will discuss his political plan to determine Israel's borders during his term in office while receiving recognition from the US administration for the planned measure. Yediot wrote that the most sensitive issue that will be raised during Olmert's meetings with Bush and with Vice President Dick Cheney will be the Iranian threat to Israel and the fear that if there should be an American military operation against Iran's nuclear installations, Iran will try to strike at Israeli population centers with long-range missiles.

Over the weekend, most media led with the shaping up of the new government, which will have 27 members -- the largest cabinet in Israeli history. On Sunday, the media reported that Interim PM Ehud Olmert has chosen the Labor Party's Amir Peretz as vice premier and defense minister, Yuli Tamir as education minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer as national infrastructure minister, and Shalom Simhon as agriculture minister. Yediot wrote that Kadima's Abraham Hirchson would become finance minister, and Tzipi Livni foreign minister. Maariv and other media saw Shaul Mofaz as finance/interior/national infrastructure minister. Today, Yediot said that former Shin Bet head Avi Dichter would get the internal security portfolio, due to AG Menachem Mazuz's ruling that Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman cannot fill the position. This morning, Israel Radio reported that Shas demands four ministerial posts. Today, the media reported on various recriminations on the part of disappointed politicians. Maariv cited an alleged claim by Shimon Peres, no. 2 in Kadima that Kadima is giving up its assets. Last night on Channel 2-TV, Prof. Uriel Reichman, to whom former PM Ariel Sharon allegedly promised the education portfolio, announced his resignation from the Knesset (banner in Ha'aretz). Yediot and Israel Radio reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz canceled the traditional Defense Minister's reception to be held on Israeli Independence Day, which was supposed to include 4,000 guests, including the

diplomatic corps. According to the radio, the nomination of Peretz as defense minister motivated Mofaz's unprecedented decision.

In its lead story, The Jerusalem Post reported that fearing an Iranian missile attack, the IDF has raised the level of vigilance of its Arrow 2 anti-ballistic missile defense systems and has reinforced personnel at the command center at the Palmahim Air Force base north of Ashdod. Major media cited a report drafted by a military-civilian committee appointed by former PM Sharon and chaired by former minister Dan Meridor, according to which other countries in the Middle East could follow Iran in equipping themselves with nuclear weapons. Ha'aretz wrote that the committee recommended to Mofaz on Sunday that Israel should maintain its policy of nuclear ambiguity, that as Jordan has strategic importance for Israel, its stability should be supported, and that the National Security Council should become the government's central military planning authority.

Ha'aretz and Yediot cited US media as saying Sunday that the US and its allies are preparing a "financial offensive against Iran if the latter refuses to cooperate again with the international community and stop its uranium enrichment activity. Yediot reported that President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld have initiated a multi-billion dollar program to station commando units in 20 US embassies in the Middle East, Asia, and South America, that would be called to act in ad hoc anti-terror operations. Leading media reported that on Sunday, Fatah gunmen stormed the offices of the PA's Health Ministry in Gaza City and the Nablus municipality in a sign of growing tensions with Hamas. The media reported that for the first time, Hamas police arrested armed members of rival organizations. Yediot reported that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas has a secret plan to dissolve the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Yediot reported that Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh has three Israeli sisters who live in the Beersheva area.

On Sunday, Hatzofe reported that official Hamas representatives have been invited to attend an anti-Israel conference that is going to be held in Norway on May 15. On Sunday, Yediot and The Jerusalem Post said that the French Foreign Ministry confirmed on Friday that Paris refused to issue a visa to the Palestinian Planning Minister, Samir Abu Isha.

Ha'aretz reported that two members of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades were killed Sunday by undercover IDF troops in Bethlehem. Israel Radio reported that this morning, a Qassam rocket fell south of Ashkelon and that the IDF responded with artillery fire. Yediot and other media quoted Mofaz as saying at Sunday's cabinet meeting that Islamic Jihad tried to launch a Katyusha rocket at Israel on Friday.

On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post printed an AP dispatch quoting a top Palestinian official as saying Saturday that a stern US warning to international financial institutions has made it impossible for the PA to receive funding since Hamas took power.

Leading media reported that on Sunday, Al Jazeera-TV broadcast an audiocassette in which Osama bin Laden claimed that the cessation of aid to Hamas proves that the US and Europe support the "Zionist crusade." Maariv cited Sami Abu Zuhri, a Hamas spokesman, as saying that Hamas's ideology is totally different from that of "Sheikh bin Laden." The Jerusalem Post printed an AP story, in which GOI spokesman Ra'anana Gissin is quoted as saying that bin Laden had decided to attack Israel to deflect growing Arab animosity toward Al Qaida.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that lawyers for Steven J. Rosen and Keith Weissman, the two former AIPAC officials accused of conspiring to receive and disclose classified defense information got permission on Friday from the judge in the case to subpoena top US administration officials, including US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

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Maariv and other media reported on a precedent-setting ruling in which judge Boaz Okon from the Jerusalem District Court decided Sunday that the PA meets most requirements to qualify as a country, and that it has impunity in international law from claims by Israel for legal matters in the territory it controls. The newspaper reported that a settler-controlled educational institution had demanded compensation for

its inability to recover a financial debt in the territories.

The Jerusalem Post quoted President Bush's science adviser, Prof. John Marburger III, as saying on Sunday that "there is reason to be concerned" about Iran's nuclear potential." Marburger was a keynote speaker at a symposium held at Kibbutz Ma'aleh Hahamisha to mark the 50th anniversary of the Fulbright Program run by the US-Israel Educational Foundation. The Jerusalem Post reported that Marburger defended Bush's view on embryonic stem cell research, but that he recognized that other countries, including Israel, did not regard the issue as problematic and continued their work because of the potential that embryonic stem cells could eventually prove to repair diseased tissues and organs. On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post cited the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) as saying that the US Congress is hoping to work with Israel and other at-risk countries to develop science and technology applications to fight terrorism.

All media reported on events related to Holocaust Remembrance Day, which will be commemorated tonight and tomorrow. The Jerusalem Post reported that President Bush named nine people, including Prof. Elie Wiesel and Judy Yudof, former president of the Conservative Judaism movement, to the US Holocaust Memorial Council, which oversees the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

The Jerusalem Post wrote that the family of Daniel Wultz, a 16-year old American from Weston, Florida, who was seriously wounded in last week's Tel Aviv suicide bombing, has requested that Tel Aviv's Ichilov Hospital, as well as the American Embassy in Tel Aviv, not release any information about their son.

On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post reported that American actor Will Smith dined on Friday in Tel Aviv with Yitzhak Rabin's daughter Dalia Rabin Pelosoff, Los Angeles Israeli Consul-General Ehud Danoch, US Ambassador to Israel Richard Jones, Likud MK Silvan Shalom and his wife, Judy Shalom Nir Mozes.

Israel Radio (on Sunday) and Hamodi'a reported that three Israeli engineers are helping Iran recover from the serious earthquakes that affected it recently.

II. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The current situation, in which the PA has two heads conflicting with each other, is intolerable.... Responsibility for the renewed violence falls squarely on the Palestinians, who are being pushed by their new rulers into siege and hard times."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "With every passing day, with every step taken on the tightrope that Israel and the Palestinians are walking on, we are drawing closer to the next war."

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz: "Kadima's 'convergence' will only perpetuate the conflict."

Tel Aviv University Professor of Political Science Shaul Mishal wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "The last thing Hamas and Fatah want is a civil war, from which both sides will emerge as losers."

Diplomatic correspondent Alexander Maistrovsky wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely: "On the deeper level, the US administration has serious doubts regarding Olmert and the government he is to form, and [moreover his] hasty efforts to implement the second disengagement from Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]."

Block Quotes:

II. "Police Officer and Terrorist"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (4/23): "If anything remains of the appearance of a separation between the official and the underground in the PA, it disappeared when Hamas took control of the government. The clearest illustration of this to date

is the decision by the Interior Minister of the Hamas government, Said Siam, to appoint Jamal Abu Samhadana as inspector general of his ministry and commander of a new security force. Abu Samhadana is completely unacceptable to Israel, whose civilians he murdered for years from his Rafah-area hideaway, and to the Americans; his Popular Resistance Committees killed Americans in the Gaza Strip in 2003. In exchange for his appointment, Abu Samhadana is supposed to change his ways, but he has not promised to do so and, in fact, has announced that his organization will continue to act against Israel.... Abbas's declaration of a year ago, when he was elected to succeed Yasser Arafat, regarding the unity of the government, the law and the arms in the PA, has sounded like a sad joke since the Hamas victory in the legislative assembly elections. The current situation, in which the PA has two heads conflicting with each other, is intolerable.... Responsibility for the renewed violence falls squarely on the Palestinians, who are being pushed by their new rulers into siege and hard times."

II. "On the Way To War"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach commented in the editorial of mass-circulation, pluralist *Yediot Aharonot* (4/23): "With every passing day, with every step taken on the tightrope that Israel and the Palestinians are walking on, we are drawing closer to the next war.... Israel, with American support -- it was the Bush administration that strongly pushed for elections in the PA, it is now determined more than anyone to reverse their results, and it is not the one that is going to pay the price -- regards toppling Hamas the way it has always regarded steps taken vis-a-vis the Palestinians: as if there were no tomorrow, as if the way in which its desire is achieved has no impact whatsoever on what happens afterwards.... The battle against Hamas's rise to power needs to be fought patiently and soberly. It obliges the leaders to know what to do -- and, even more so, what not to do. This was said by one of the more prominent members of the security establishment in a conversation that was held on the eve of the Palestinian parliamentary elections, before anyone had even guessed that Hamas was going to win. That statement is no less applicable today than it was then. The problem is that in a completely breached political establishment and with a belligerent military, fewer and fewer people are listening to those kinds of statements, which get drowned out in the tumultuous march to war."

III. "The Main Thing Is That There's a Partner"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in *Ha'aretz* (4/24): "Ariel Sharon bequeathed to generations to come the US President's promise to support the settlement blocs.... A very senior figure in Kadima responded to this question in a moment of honesty by saying she fears that the negotiations over the permanent status agreement will fail, and that the international community will blame Israel. In other words, the new government itself is not a partner to an agreement based on the international legitimacy given to the June 4, 1967 borders, with mutual adjustments and a just and agreed solution to the refugee problem. Kadima's 'convergence' will only perpetuate the conflict."

IV. "Hamas and Fatah Stand To Lose From a Civil War"

Tel Aviv University Professor of Political Science Shaul Mishal wrote in *Yediot Aharonot* (4/23): "The last thing Hamas and Fatah want is a civil war, from which both sides will emerge as losers. Their fear is of a third factor that will neutralize both of them -- be it the force of worldwide jihad, such as al-Qaida, or a massive Israeli incursion into the Palestinian Authority territories. Moreover, the fact that in Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan there are Islamic movements that constitute a threat to the government will lead to the quick intervention of either those countries themselves or the Arab League in the conflict between the various Palestinian factions.... Paradoxically, Hamas only stands to gain from the situation as it is at present. All of those who now are boycotting Hamas will be forced to speak with it precisely because of their concerns about the possible deterioration, fear that Hamas will lose control, and then it won't be Fatah that will find itself back in power but other, hostile forces. Fatah cannot turn back the clock and regain the role and status it had before Hamas's victory. The truth of the matter is that Fatah is a divided and torn party.... The only one who can still maneuver is PA Chairman Abu Mazen, who is a Fatah man. The security forces are subordinate to the Palestinian Authority and, under normal

circumstances, should be made subordinate to the new government. However, since Fatah is not prepared to play by the new rules of the game, and Hamas is not prepared to regard itself as the new government that has replaced the old one but rather sees itself as an entirely new regime, it has insisted that it be given control over the focal points of power, which it wants to mold and organize in keeping with its ideology."

IV. "Uncle Sam's Pros and Cons"

Diplomatic correspondent Alexander Maistrovoy wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely (4/20): "Ehud Olmert's victory in the Israeli [general] elections caused mixed feelings in Washington.. From the very beginning the [US] administration staked on a predictable, complacent and manageable leader ... [Ehud Olmert]. This is crucial for the US in the situation of growing instability and unpredictability in the Middle East.... However, on the deeper level, the US administration has serious doubts regarding Olmert and the government he is to form, and [moreover his] hasty efforts to implement the second disengagement from Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank] ... which might ... affect US efforts to fight global terrorism... Al Qaida's and Hamas's potential consolidation of their hold on the West Bank might pose an immediate threat to the Hashemite dynasty -- the United States' closest ally in the Arab world ... breach the balance of power in the Middle East ... and threaten the efforts to stabilize Iraq.... Such a ... hasty disengagement would be ... perceived ... as a panic flight and ... provoke the Palestinians, Iran, and Syria to attack [Israel] ... create havoc; weaken Israel ... and change the United States' attitude towards the Jewish state."

12. Iran: Nuclear Program:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "If Bush waits too long, the sense that it is too late to stop Iran will grow, the window for action will close and his own political decline will deepen further."

Block Quotes:

"Speed Up Iran Sanctions"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (4/23): "It is assumed by many that US President George Bush -- floundering in the polls, reorganizing his staff, and tied up in Iraq -- is unwilling or incapable of upping the ante on the diplomatic front, let alone taking military action. In reality, Bush's political problems and the Iranian threat are not in conflict, but part of the same challenge. The centerpiece of the Bush presidency is foreign policy, and that policy will have failed if the most dangerous regime in the world can run circles around the US and acquire nuclear weapons. Such a failure would certainly dwarf and possibly undo the administration's accomplishment of ridding Iraq of a similarly belligerent dictatorship. The sense that this is the direction of events, in turn, undermines Bush politically at home. It is not enough for the State Department to make vague claims about the headway it is making; significant momentum must be demonstrated.... There is substantial agreement between Washington, London, Berlin and Paris that the mullahs must be stopped. As usual, however, it will fall on the White House to provide the leadership necessary to galvanize such a consensus into effective action. But if Bush waits too long, the sense that it is too late to stop Iran will grow, the window for action will close and his own political decline will deepen further."